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DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, CANADA.

DESPATCH

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EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, OTTAWA, CANADA.

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References

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Mr. Cadogan
Mr. Pitt
Mr. Ignatieff
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USA
For Eastern
of + ME
Chambers
Lansdown
(Supplies)
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cc 439-40
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After less than five months in Cuba I cannot simulate erudition concerning developments in this country. However, a brief outline of my impressions as they apply to the climactic events of April may be useful to you and to our Ambassador-designate.

2. The defeat of the April 17 "invasion" of Cuba by anti-Castro exiles can already be seen in retrospect as a decisive point-of-no-return for the Castro regime, and perhaps also for the Cuban people. This misadventure substantiated the Government's warnings against imperialist aggression from the United States; the ardent patriotism which it excited enabled the Castro regime to suppress all internal opposition, to step up the pace of its "socialist" revolution and to sanctify as sacrifices the exigencies of the economic crisis which Cuba is experiencing. As a result, Cuba now appears to be irrevocably committed to be a proletarian dictatorship of the communist pattern and to a foreign policy that conforms closely to Soviet international objectives in Latin America, the United Nations and elsewhere.

Foreign Policy

3. For many months before the exile assault Prime Minister Castro had been attempting to convince the Cuban people that they must be armed and prepared to defend Cuba against the onslaught of revanchist United States imperialism. He assured them that against such a powerful enemy they could not stand alone, and Cuba had therefore to seek support and friendship in the Sino-Soviet bloc. Many Cubans remained unconvinced of the validity of either of these basic principles of Castro's foreign policy. Castro's cries of "invasion invasion", when there had been no invasion, had increased Cuban doubts; and repugnance toward communism as well as imperialism was an inherent part of the pure nationalism that the Cuban leader so fervently inspired.

4. This situation changed dramatically on April 17. The "invasion" proved, at least to the satisfaction of the previously unconvinced, that Castro had been correct. Armed forces supported by the United States had, in fact, attempted to reconquer Cuba. They had failed because Cubans fought fiercely for Cuba's right to self-determination. The Sino-Soviet bloc had responded promptly with assurances of solidarity and "all necessary aid". Castro had welcomed these assurances and had committed his Government's foreign policy to closer alignment with the bloc. In the process, any possibility of a return to friendly relations with the United States had disappeared -- perhaps forever.

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5. The aftermath of the debacle was increased intransigence toward the United States and greater affinity with the Sino-Soviet bloc:

(a) The United States was denounced in abusive terms for fomenting, preparing and assisting the aggressors. President Kennedy was violently vilified for his support of the so-called Revolutionary Council and his personal responsibility for the fiasco. United States foreign policy throughout the world was ridiculed as an expression of economic avarice and political decadence. NATO, SEATO, CENTO, France, West Germany, Portugal, Spain, Laos, the Congo and innumerable others were cited as instruments of aggressive United States international intentions.

(b) The Soviet Union, China and other bloc states were praised for their peaceful and friendly attitudes. New or augmented trade agreements and cultural exchanges were signed with the Soviet Union, Poland and Czechoslovakia. (The latter country seems to have a special place in the Cuban sun, probably to demonstrate the degree of industrial refinement that can be achieved under Soviet auspices.) Soviet policies were explained in greater detail, displayed with more prominence and praised with more lavish superlatives.

(c) Latin America was treated with more restraint than when Cuba was threatening to spread its "socialist" revolution throughout the continent. Cuban propaganda confined itself to proselytism by example. This less blatant Cuban posture is in accord with the subtler Soviet ambitions and techniques in the sub-continent. The Cuban aim now appeared to be to cultivate support rather than foment revolution in Latin American countries. Brazil, Mexico and Ecuador received special attention and commendation for opposing any intervention in Cuba.

(d) In the United Nations General Assembly, far from displaying any independent judgment, Cuba intrigued and voted with the Soviet bloc; outspoken and unashamed support was given to Soviet policies on disarmament, nuclear testing, the Congo, and other items.

(d) At the sub-summit meeting of "neutralist" and "unaligned" nations in Cairo, Cuba's presence prejudiced representation of other Latin American countries because, in fact, the Cuban Government is now much more firmly and fundamentally committed to the Soviet bloc than any of the other nations attending. It was not clear whether Cuba was maintaining a watching brief for the Soviet bloc or whether it intended to use the meetings as a forum for further denunciations of United States imperialism.

Internal Political Situation

6. In the first few months of 1961 Castro's political fortunes appeared to be declining. His agricultural and industrial reform programmes had hardly begun to produce tangible results. His dictatorial methods and his tiresome propaganda were becoming onerous. He and his revolution were losing their glamour. He still enjoyed fanatical support among the poor and under-privileged but the middle class and the intellectuals had deserted him, and many other former supporters were wavering. Counter-revolutionary plots and sabotage were increasing and Government repression seemed only to make matters worse.

7. This internal deterioration ended abruptly in mid-April, when the entire nation was placed on an emergency alert. Cuba was invaded, and the pent-up nationalism inculcated through months of propaganda and indoctrination at last found an outlet. Militant nationalism and the intimidation imposed through the round-up of tens of thousands of persons who were suspected of anti-Castro sympathies, or who were "in a position" to assist the invaders, prevented any internal insurrection. Long after the insurgent forces had been defeated, fear continued to be the dominant factor and the security police (G-2) made the most of it. A network of civilian informers and vigilantes was recruited under the banners of Committees for the Defence of the Revolution.

8. The months of hope and suspense were over. Castro's faithful followers were jubilant. His uncertain supporters were convinced -- either of his infallibility or of the folly of further resistance. His foes were thoroughly defeated and dispirited. Fidel had vanquished his enemies outside and inside Cuba. He lost no time in exploiting his renewed prestige and power. He confirmed that there would be no elections, no liberalization of his regime, no slackening in the pace of his reform programmes. He imposed new restrictions, more regulations, more regimentation, new sacrifices. He nationalized private schools. He attacked the Church. He consolidated his command and he made the security police the guardians of his regime. Finally, he promised Cuba a "socialist" constitution (which will probably be promulgated on the July 26th anniversary of his revolution). There now seemed to be no avenue for dissent, no turning back from a course that led unequivocally toward communist "socialism".

Economic and Social Situation

9. During March, the United States embargo on exports to Cuba appeared to be crippling the economy. Prime Minister Castro criticized popular grumbling concerning shortages of consumer goods. In April, the Minister of Industry, "Che" Guevara, revealed that the economic difficulties were much more fundamental. They involved not only consumer goods but also shortages of raw materials, industrial machinery, spare parts and technicians. They would continue "through the coming years and would bring to Cuba sacrifices and scarcities". There was growing discontent and disillusion with the Sino-Soviet economic assistance which was supposed to offset the consequences of the United States embargo.

10. Two weeks later, however, the reality of the national emergency had distracted public attention from these irritants, and national patriotism aroused the "spirit of sacrifice" that Fidel Castro had demanded. Sabotage (which had been seriously disrupting production) practically ceased. Public discipline and privation provided a sense of participation with the Militia and the combat troops who were defending Cuba under fire.

11. These events did not alter the basic economic problems, but they and the subsequent campaign of repression reduced to a whisper the complaints and criticism of the Government. Public interest was also diverted toward the conversion of all exclusive clubs in Cuba into Workers' Social Centres, further industrial and commercial nationalization, and redoubled efforts to eliminate illiteracy throughout the country. Shortages of some foods and rising prices continued to cause uneasiness concerning incipient inflation -- bank notes in circulation doubled during the last year -- but the Castro Government's economic policies had gained new justification and renewed vitality from the armed conflict.

Cuban-Canadian Relations

12. During the early months of the year the Cuban Government and people had acquired a better understanding of the implications of Canada's policy of maintaining normal commercial relations. Cuba's acute shortage of foreign exchange assisted this understanding.
13. The repressive measures enforced at the time of the April emergency and the Prime Minister's May Day speech, which precipitated action against Canadian nuns and priests, caused a new source of irritation. Simultaneously, however, the Cuban Government was publicizing every Canadian statement or action that could be interpreted as a policy of non-intervention in Cuba. Prime Minister Castro intervened personally to relieve the intense pressure on the Canadian religious community. Subsequently, the Cuban press devoted considerable attention to Canada, slanting reports to convey the impression that virulent Canadian nationalism was resisting United States political and economic pressures.
14. The Cuban Government has not been noted for finesse in the conduct of its international affairs. Its comparative restraint in recent relations with Canada may be pure commercial or propaganda opportunism. On the other hand, until the current economic crisis has been overcome, Cuba may not wish to abandon either the remote possibility of some accommodation with the United States or the potential usefulness of Canada's influence with the United States.

Conclusions

15. It is generally acknowledged that United States support of the April 17 "invasion" of Cuba was a tragic blunder. Cuban external and internal policies are now very definitely oriented toward the Sino-Soviet bloc "socialist" system. This process has gone so far and is now so firmly established that Fidel Castro probably could not reverse it or alter it materially, even if he wished to do so. There is no sign that he has any such intention; nor is there any indication that Cuba might be persuaded to seek some modus vivendi with the United States. Nevertheless, so long as such a possibility exists, however remote it may be, Canada should pursue a policy of friendly but not fraternal relations with Cuba, and should adamantly oppose any suggestion of outside intervention in Cuban affairs.



M. N. Bow,
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